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SUBJECT: PROPOSED SPACE LAUNCH ALARMS NEWFOUNDLAND GOVERNMENT

¶1. CG was called afternoon of April 8 by Robert Thompson, the senior civil servant of the Newfoundland-Labrador government, who expressed the province's concerns about a proposed Titan IV launch from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. Thompson noted that the hazard area of the proposed launch included the Hibernia and Terra Nova oil production platforms, as well as a drilling rig operating in the area. For safety reasons the operators of the platforms would halt oil production and evacuate all 250 personnel until after the launch. The Hibernia platform operators say that they would need to start shutdown and evacuation 96 hours in advance of the proposed launch. Evacuation would minimize the risk to life, but would entail a major loss of revenue to the platform operators and the province. In the worst case, debris landing on an evacuated production platform could cause a major environmental and economic problem.

¶2. Thompson's primary concern was that the USG put in place some sort of risk reduction measures so that the hazard area would not include major offshore oil production facilities. He was also concerned about information flow, noting that Premier Williams was receiving conflicting reports: the province was first told that the launch had been postponed indefinitely, then heard that it was re-scheduled for April 13. They are seeking clarity about USG plans for the launch.

¶3. COMMENT: Offshore energy production is a major source of economic activity in Newfoundland-Labrador. Shutting down oil production for several days would have a significant financial impact. It would also fairly directly impact U.S. energy security since most of the oil from Hibernia is ultimately exported to the U.S. In addition, U.S. firms are involved in the operation of the production and drilling operations and would be hurt financially as well. From a public relations standpoint, having to close the platforms would be a serious problem. END COMMENT.

HILL